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ABSTRACT

This report is an outline of the content of a 3-year project which is divided into seven phases. Through a review of the literature and interviews with circle leaders, Phase I investigates what knowledge exists on study circles. Phase II presents information on the educational psychology of the study circle gathered through questionnaires, interviews, and participant observations. Phase III analyzes how the study circle differs from group work in adult education. This analysis is achieved through evaluation of studies in progress. Phases IV and V deal with impediments to study circles and the role of course material in implementing these circles. Follow-up studies, analysis, and evaluation of course material are methodologies used in these phases. To ascertain what training information a circle leader needs, phase VI uses questionnaires and interviews and experiments with different forms of guidance. Through summaries of experience gained in study circles, phase VII investigates how the study circle activities are to be evaluated. Interim reports will be issued as the project proceeds. (BRB)

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SCHOOL RESEARCH

newsletter

August 1973 Current project 1973:16

Title of project: The study circle as a teaching situation

In progress at: The Institute of Education, University of Stockholm

Scientific leader: Professor Torbjörn Stockfelt

Project leader: Jan Byström

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Background

The current expansion of adult education is designed to benefit those who have received the shortest schooling, i. e. those with only six or seven years' elementary schooling or a similar educational background.

The motives behind this policy include equality, greater democracy and the community's need of well-educated people.

An alternative form of study which has attracted attention in this context is that of the study circle. Among other things the initial experience gained by FÖVUX (the Committee for Experimental Activities in Adult Education) suggests that positive results can be achieved with circle studies among this category of adults.

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By way of a background to this presentation we can refer to the following extracts from the FÖVUX interim report, "Catchment Activities for Circle Studies in Adult Education" (SOU 1972:19):

- The persons who were approached, and whose basic education was usually confined to six or seven years' elementary schooling, were allowed to choose the subject they wished to take, in addition to which they were able to choose between different study arrangements.

- Two-thirds of the 1,098 persons enrolling in FÖVUX circles completed the course.

- 83 per cent of the participants had only attended elementary school and 64 per cent stated that they had not pursued any studies since the conclusion of their compulsory school attendance.

- The majority of those curtailing their studies pleaded practical reasons of one kind or another, but uncertainty and other psychological reasons seemed to play an important part in many cases.

- Efforts have therefore been made to ascertain the qualities which make a good circle leader, but the interviews of participants showed that they had no firm views on this point ..... In the opinion of the Committee, the fact that the participants were fairly uncritical in this and other respects during the first experimental year can be attributed to their generally being unused to studying, in addition to which they were unaccustomed to being offered privileges or making demands.

Summing up one can thus say that catchment activities serve to recruit people with little previous education for circle studies but that the results indicate quite a high degree

of uncertainty among those attending such courses, often no doubt combined with low motivation. Similar findings have been made previously in other connections.

Purpose of the study:

The study circle - a suitable form of study for adults!? The study circle can be traced back a long way into the past - to the popular movements. The study circle was created for adults.

B U T .....

A What do we know or what do we think we know about circle studies?

B Is there one educational psychology of the study circle?

C How does the study circle differ from group work e.g. in local adult education?

D Study impediments in study circles?

E The role of the course material in circle studies?

F What training/information, does a circle leader need?
G How are the activities of a study circle to be evaluated?

Disposition of the project
Three consecutive years have been planned for. Plans for year 1 have been finalized. Those for years 2 and 3 are to be regarded as preliminary since the different items of the project are based on each other:

Phase A: What do we know or what do we think we know about circle studies?

- history
- goals and current regulations

- how a study circle works
- the role of the circle leader
- principles governing the production of course material
- reasons for the curtailment of studies
- etc.

Method: Review of relevant literatur
Questionnaire/interviews of experienced circle leaders and others

Phase B: Is there one educational psychology of the study circle?

- different types of circle - different types of teaching?
- pedagogical analysis of the study circle - pedagogical idiosyncrasies
- the study circle in relation to goals and current regulations
- how do circle studies operate in the new popular movements, e.g. the United NLF Groups?

Method: Questionnaires/interviews of circle leaders and other key figures
Evaluation of a random sample of existing circles of different kinds and with different aims (leading up to examinations, social involvement, aesthetic activities)
Participant observation to see what happens in "live activities".

Phase C: How does the study circle differ from group work e.g. in local adult education?

- analysis of group work
- findings from the study circle methodology experiment now in progress at Sveaplan Adult High School, Stockholm

- possible attempt to run a course in the form of group work and as a study circle.

Method: Evaluation and analysis of studies in progress

Phase D: Study impediments in study circles?

- Reasons why members of circles fail to complete their studies

Method: Follow-up of reasons for curtailment of studies within a random selection of circles

Phase E: The role of the course material in circle studies?

- principles governing the production of teaching materials/course material
- the ability of the circle to influence its own teaching materials
- pedagogical design
- combinations using audiovisual aids
- study instructions and study guidance

Methods: Analysis of various kinds of existing course material
Evaluation of course material in studies now in progress
Experiments with different types of design

Phase F: What training information does a circle leader need?

- the role of the circle leader
- what information does the circle leader feel that he/she needs?
- guidance for new circle leaders

Method: Questionnaire/interviews of new circle leaders
Experiments with different forms of guidance

Phase G: How are the activities of a study circle to be evaluated?

A summary of experience gained in this sector in the course of the project.
The methodological aspect, but also experience with reference to the question "To what extent are study goals realized?" (will also be reported during earlier phases). N.B. Time indications refer to summaries of findings.

Interim reports will be issued as the project proceeds.

The above presentation is mainly concerned with the content of the project, hence the brief consideration given to the methodological aspect. For a more detailed description of methods the reader is referred to a Memorandum dated October 1972.

Most of the practical parts of the project will be conducted under the aegis of ABF (The Workers' Educational Association) and Brevskolan (A Correspondence Institute).

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